

# WARD NEWS

Ward 4 - Councilmember Stark

[www.stpaul.gov/ward4](http://www.stpaul.gov/ward4)

651.266.8640



July 2008

[www.stpaul.gov/ward4](http://www.stpaul.gov/ward4)

## Saint Paul City Council's Ward 4 E-Newsletter Volume 5, July 2008

### What's inside:

The Light Rail Project  
Instant Run-Off Voting  
Sober House Ordinance  
Bars & Liquor Licenses  
Six months in office -- How are we doing?

### The Light Rail Project

The City of Saint Paul held a municipal consent public hearing on June 4 regarding a package of engineering documents for the light rail project. The involved stakeholders must approve the plans and raise concerns at this point before further engineering is completed. The information considered at the hearing reflected 15% of the project plan, including the location of stations and platforms, sidewalk and lane widths, locations where on-street parking will be retained and lost, turning lanes, pedestrian access points to stations, and the like. Several community members and organizations raised important issues of concern moving forward, including the process for designing stations and incorporating public art, the design of streetscape, the need to ensure that the stations at Hamline, Victoria, and Western Avenues get built as soon as possible, and more.

I raised a concern that the combination of the loss of most of the on-street parking and relatively narrow sidewalks might make for a sub-par pedestrian environment on the City's primary transit corridor. In my view we need at least 12 feet of sidewalk on both sides of the streets to accommodate street trees, street lights, benches, snow storage, pedestrians (including those in wheelchairs), and outdoor seating areas. As such, I asked the project engineers to study an alternative that would be one thru lane of automobile traffic in each direction, with increased on-street parking on one of the side of the street, wider sidewalks, and possibly even bicycle lanes. This scenario that I'm describing may prove unfeasible or less desirable than the current plan, but without looking at it we cannot make a thoughtful decision about what is gained and lost in each scenario. On July 9, the Council will vote regarding municipal consent on the Central Corridor project.

I also participated in a meeting organized by County Commissioner Toni Carter where Met Council Chairman Peter Bell was asked to respond to a number of concerns from the community about the station design and public art process. My intention is to continue to press the Met Council to maximize opportunities for community input into the station design/public art process, and to expect a high quality end-product that the community, the City and the Met Council will take pride in for years to come.

### Instant Run-Off Voting (IRV)

As you probably know, the Better Ballot Campaign submitted a petition to the City of Saint Paul to put a question on the November 2008 ballot for voters to decide whether or not they want City elections to be run using the IRV system. I am a supporter of Instant Run-Off voting for two primary reasons: 1) the very low turnout in our municipal primaries means that a very small segment of our electorate is participating in a very important step in our current electoral process, and IRV would likely mean more voters choosing among more candidates; and 2) I believe IRV would make it easier for citizens to run for local office and to feel like they would have a legitimate chance to succeed.

# WARD NEWS

Ward 4 - Councilmember Stark

[www.stpaul.gov/ward4](http://www.stpaul.gov/ward4)

651.266.8640



City Attorney John Choi and his team recently issued an opinion that IRV is likely to be found unconstitutional in Minnesota. IRV was approved in Minneapolis in 2006 but implementation there is being held up pending a district court ruling. While I have the utmost respect for the City Attorney, without any certainty about the constitutionality question, I feel strongly that the Council should put IRV on the ballot.

The question of state constitutionality is the only relevant question in the discussion about whether or not the Council will put IRV on the ballot. However, once constitutionality is decided, and as we look into the future, County Elections manager Joe Mansky and others have raised very real and significant concerns about the logistics and implementation of IRV in St. Paul elections. Perhaps the most significant of these concerns is that school board elections would still be conducted in the current manner, and are governed solely by state law, which would mean different balloting systems for City and School Board elections.

## **Sober House Ordinance**

On June 13, the Saint Paul Planning Commission held a public hearing where many people testified about the draft ordinance. It was an opportunity for community members, staff, sober house operators, and Planning Commissioners, to ask more questions and consider the various aspects of the proposal.

After months of work on the part of City staff and neighbors alike, there will be a public hearing on Wednesday, July 2, at 5:30pm, regarding the draft sober house ordinance (<http://www.stpaul.gov/index.asp?NID=2622>). Basically, the ordinance ensures that there will be reasonable accommodation for residents in recovery to live together in a setting similar to a family unit. The draft ordinance also defines what a sober house is, requires a parking plan to manage impact on neighborhoods, limits how many people can reside in a home according to the residential zoning district, as well as establishes a recommended minimum distance of 330 feet between sober houses.

I have two goals in this process. The first is to clearly define what a sober house is and is not, so that we can prevent landlords looking to make a few extra bucks from claiming to be a sober house in order to get around the City's ordinance regarding the maximum number of unrelated adults (4) that can live in one housing unit. The second is to avoid conflicts between sober houses and neighbors around issues such as parking.

## **Bars and Liquor Licenses**

Over the past few months, several issues have come before the Council regarding the operations of bars and the provision of liquor licenses. The largest bar in Ward 4, which for many years had also been the bar in the Ward with the most police calls and code violations, American Sports Café (on Como near 280), recently let its liquor license expire and has closed.

A lot of attention was focused on the issue of allowing bars to stay open until 4:00 a.m. during the Republican National Convention. The Council ended up approving a resolution that will allow larger capacity bars to pay \$2,500 in order to be able to stay open until 4:00 a.m. during the RNC. For better or worse, there are no bars in Ward 4 that meet the size threshold.

The Council also approved, and I supported, an ordinance making it somewhat easier for restaurants to apply for licenses to serve alcohol on outdoor patios. The old ordinance required 90% of neighboring property owners within 300 feet to sign a petition supporting the patio. I heard from area restaurants that it can be difficult to even get a response one way or the other from 90% of the surrounding property owners, particularly when there are out-of-town landlords. The new

# WARD NEWS

Ward 4 - Councilmember Stark

[www.stpaul.gov/ward4](http://www.stpaul.gov/ward4)

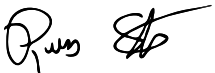
651.266.8640

ordinance establishes requirements with more nuance and flexibility for business-owners., while ensuring that neighboring property owners still have a strong voice in the process.

## **Six Months in Office – How are we doing?**

It's difficult to believe that I've reached the 6-month mark in this job. To mark the occasion, I would love to hear from you about you think I am doing and how you think the Ward 4 Office (Samantha, Darlyne, and I) are doing as a group. We welcome your comments and will share some of them (good and bad) in next month's e-newsletter.

Best,



## **Be in the know:**

- Rock-Tenn Community Advisory Panel Meeting –  
Reviewing public health & economics  
Monday, July 7, 7-10pm at the Wilder Center (451 Lexington Pkwy N)